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ABSTRACT

Teachers of foreign languages should continually reflect on the appropriateness of language courses (especially English as a second language courses) and the level of satisfaction among its learners. Teachers should examine the "routine" ways of developing curricula for such learning, exploring whether or not objectives developed from needs analyses truly consider the specific needs of current learners. The uniqueness of teaching English as a second language and the need for such teaching to be relevant to current and future needs must also be taken into account. Teachers should ascertain whether or not students' are proficient in their native language in order to ensure the effectiveness of reading instruction in English. Authenticity of instructional materials is an issue in second language instruction; indeed, in spite of the more pervasive use of "authentic" reading materials, non-authentic reading materials continue to be used. Student motivation must be addressed by teachers, because learning a second language requires the personal commitment of the learner. Teaching quality could be improved by requiring teachers to do more coursework in methodology. (CB)

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WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE THAT LSP COURSES GIVE VALUE FOR MONEY?

by John Greenwood

Paper presented at the LSP Convegno (Rome, Italy, October 12-14, 1981).

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA

ESTRATTO DA:

ATTI DEL CONVEGNO

L'INSEGNAMENTO DELLE LINGUE STRANIERE NELLE FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE

(Roma 12-14 ottobre 1981)

A cura di Giuseppe Vella e Ioan Gutia

Istituto di Lingue Straniere
Facoltà di Scienze Politiche

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Paper given at the LSP Convegno at the Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, October 12-14, 1981.

"WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE THAT LSP COURSES GIVE VALUE FOR MONEY?"

I suppose by way of introduction I ought to present some credentials, seeing I am among such distinguished and experienced practioners in the field of LSP.

When members of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Rome very kindly invited me to present a paper at this conference, I presumed they did so for my role as an ELO for the British Council here in Italy. During my two years here I have obviously come to know to a certain extent the situation in Italian universities, though my work has been mainly concerned with teacher - training at the Secondary School level. In any case, I obviously could not be so presumptious as to address yuo here this morning as an expert on the LSP situation in Italian universities. You are the experts, not me.

I would like to wear my other - more usual - hat this morning. As some of you know, I do not normally work for the British Council. I am here in Italy on a 3-year leave of absence from Manchester University where I am a lecturer in the teaching of English overseas. As such, I am basically a teacher-trainer, running post-graduate courses for teachers of E.S.L. (either British or non-British). Through my work with two colleagues at Manchester (Ken James and Bob Jordan) I have come in contact with the language problems of overseas students in British universities. It is this experience which I wish to draw upon in my remarks in this paper.

I am thus speaking from a similar position to Keith Morrow's, as somebody who, while aware of the Italian situation, speaks as an outsider. If you like, it's a kind of comparability exercise. By the way, the tutors to overseas students in British universities have formed an association called the SELMOUS group (Special English

Language Materials for Overseas University Students) and you may find their various publications useful. (1).

In preparing this paper the first thing I did was to read through the report of the Cagliari conference on ESP held in April '78. (2) This was before I came to Italy and so I didn't attend the conference. A pity because it would have given me a clear idea of how you, as practioners reacted to the various papers at the conference. Still, for me a very interesting collection of papers, reflecting, I think, accurately the state of the art in 1978. However, as I read through the papers I began to query some of the statements and their assumptions. Could we now 3 years later be so certain and satisfied about various points? What evidence has arisen since 78 to confirm or refute the Cagliari statements? For instance, John Clegg (p. 76) states: "the study skills approach to the teaching of language remains central to what Teachers of English for political science do". Is this statement still valid? Do you as practioners still believe it? And where is the evidence? Have you conducted any experiments/ evaluations to check on its validity? It may well be still valid, but do we rely solely on intuition here? Is it an easy way out as far as the teaching is concerned, eg in finding teaching material?

Another example: Magda Leonardi (p. 102) states: "A course should be and can be geared to its specific aim and can economise omitting elements not relevant to that aim". Again, I would ask:

1. Is this still your considered opinion in 1981?
2. Where is your evidence?

I will return to these two examples later.

So I want to attempt a re-appraisal, and the title of my paper is intentionally provocative. I wish to imply that perhaps we as teachers should not be satisfied that our courses are adequate and satisfy our particular learners. It is perhaps significant that, although Keith Morrow and I prepared our papers independently (in fact I saw his abstract only last Sunday), we both seem to be raising similar que-

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(1) Further information available from a SELMOUS member: Mr R R Jordan, Department of Education, Manchester University, Manchester 13, UK.

(2) "Il ruolo della lingua nella Facoltà di Scienze Politiche". Atti del seminario nazionale di studi CAGLIARI 9-12 Ottobre 1978, a cura di Laura Jottini (Edizioni della Torre).

stions and querying similar assumptions. And yesterday I had a short discussion with Laura Jottini who is also thinking on similar lines.

I will now deal in some detail with six aspects, all interrelated, so there will inevitably be much overlap.

First, needs analysis.

It is normal practice to make a distinction between the immediate, short-term needs for the students (EAP) and the more distant, long-term needs (EOP). Thus, Laura Jottini (p. 68) sets out the familiar diagrammatic summary of an EAP course on the basis of the relevant academic needs of the students:

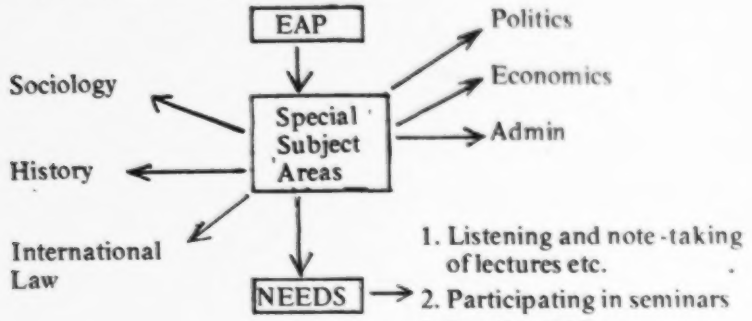

Fig. 1

Then, the EOP needs can be stated as (cf. handout for Testing EAP Conference, Bergamo Sept 81):

"In general, however, we may say that the Political Science student tends to think of a career in public administration..." and "the primary need in the Italian context is reading (not just for academic but also for professional needs...)".

And, based on these needs analyses we list our objectives (presumably to satisfy these identified needs) and then draw up our syllabuses. All familiar practice. But let's look at the needs again. How are these in reality derived? Presumably by three means:

1. Observation, i.e direct information from seeing our students trying to cope with, for example, a lecture in English or a seminar discussion in French.

2. Enquiry from the customers, i.e. asking our students such questions as "When do you need English? What type of English?" etc.
3. Intuition, i.e by introspection, based on our own experience and common-sense.

Such a procedure seems admirably reasonable. But what are the proportions we give to these three means? I suspect we give most to our own intuition and this could be unrealistic and unreliable.

Another point: have any longitudinal and post-course surveys been done? I suspect no. By this I mean: what about asking our students how relevant etc they found their ESP courses (both EAP and EOP aspects) in the light of their subsequent experience as public administrators, bank employees, businessmen etc?

An analogy here may help. In Britain all school teachers must have preservice training. In spite of such good preparation during the preservice course, many new teachers in their first few years of teaching remark that in certain respects their training was irrelevant or inadequate. With the experience they *now* had, they would have preferred a different training in certain respects. What about our ESP students, or rather post-students? Do they have similar reactions? I think I'm right in saying that it is the third means - intuition - which is the dominant influence and we should give more weight to the other two.

Secondly, the distinctiveness of LSP.

As we know, LSP courses are now very popular and have become a fashion or a bandwagon. The work of the Council of Europe (Wilkins, Van Ek, Trim etc) and Munby (3) has given rise to such a development. We are now familiar with such terms as learners' needs, terminal behaviour, objectives, goals and purposes. However, we must not forget that many an experienced and sensitive teacher of so-called General English has always been concerned with the needs of the learners and the purpose of the learning. One trouble of course is that in the typical secondary school situation it is a question of TENAP (teaching English for no apparant purpose).

Again if I may refer to the Cagliari conference, Jottini (p. 67) quotes

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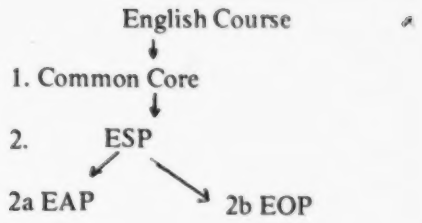
(3) John Munby (1978): *Communicative Syllabus Design* (Cambridge University Press).

Trim's two-phase syllabus, viz:



This schema begs many a question. Let me deal with just one or two. What constitutes "common core" English? This tends to be quite arbitrary, the personal choice of the teacher and the textbook writer. Can we really talk about "common core" vocabulary? *All* lexical items are context-specific and not "common", e.g.

"chalk" is specific to the classroom context and

"bus" is specific to the context of transportation, just as "Bunsen burner" is specific to the context of the science laboratory and "International Monetary Fund" to the context of finance.

Similarly with functions. If we look at a list of so-called ESP functions (eg Jottini p. 71) they seem to me very similar to those in a so-called "common core" text-book (eg the Strategies series by Abbs et al (4).

e.g. asking questions and responding
introducing
stating intention
giving details
espressing agreement/disagreement
etc...etc.

So why wait for ESP? Can we do away with this distinction between Common Core and ESP?

Thirdly, Reading.

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(4) Brian Abbs and Ingrid Freebairn (1977): *Starting Strategies* etc. (Longman).

We all seem agreed that our students need to be efficient readers both for their academic studies (EAP) and their future jobs (EOP). Also, we are all familiar with the varying aspects of the reading process about which the Cagliari report gives some good reviews. e.g.

Cortese article p. 81 97
Leonardi article p. 99-111
Clegg article p. 115-123

And of course, since Cagliari 78, many of us were involved in the LEND Convegno 80 in Martina Franca.

In my teacher-training work with school-teachers I do a lot on the teaching of Reading and I would hope the effort we are all expending on this skill is bearing gruit. However, I sometimes have reservations. Here we are doing all this cognitive activity in a second language when our students probably are unfamiliar with such activity in their own language. Would we not perhaps be helping our ESP students more if we gave them a preliminary Reading-skills course in Italian? There is evidence (going back many years to the Michael West era) that reading-skills are transferable. By so doing, our students may be getting more value for money.

This brings me to the fourth aspect, viz. Authenticity. This, unfortunately, has become yet another bandwagon. Many a teacher is tempted to collect so-called authentic or real material and assume all problems are solved, without realising some very important problems, e.g.to quote Widdowson:

"I am not sure that it is meaningful to talk about authentic language as such at all. I think it is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the writer/speaker". (5)

Keith Morrow (6) gives a similar warning. If the teacher imposes a text on the student who rejects it as either irrelevant or uninteresting, then no authentic relationship has been established for that

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(5) Henry Widdwson (1976): "The Authenticity of language data" in *Tesol 76* (Washington).

(6) Keith Morrow (1977): "Authentic texts and ESP" in Susan Holden *English for Special Purposes* (Modern English Publications)

student, however "real" the text may be, e.g.a travel brochure. We are all familiar with this problem in the TENAP situation in the secondary schools, but we comfort ourselves that it is precisely at the LSP level in universities where we overcome this, seeing that here we have students who recognize the relevance of the topic and who realise it satisfies a linguistic or cognitive need. Thus authentic relationship is established.

However, I wonder whether this assurance is an illusion. It seems to me that there is an awkward paradox here, viz:

Assumption:	1. Based on the needs analysis, we can select suitable LSP ("authentic") texts. 2. Our students already know the content matter in their L. 1 and only need reading practice of the L. 2 code. This is the rationale behind the view that ESP teachers do not need to be scientists, etc.
Normal (authentic) practice in L. 1 reading:	We normally read about something we do *NOT* know already, i.e our purpose is "to find out" whether it is for pleasure (e.g.a. novel) or for information.
Normal practice in L. 2 reading	See Assumption 2 above.

Hence the paradox:

Although "authentic" or real reading *material* (texts) is used, *non*-authentic reading *activity* occurs.

What I am therefore asking you to consider - and if possible experiment with - is to provide texts whose subject matter is *NOT* known by your students. This could still be subject-specific (i. e an economics text for economists, etc.). Another possibility is to exploit another subject not being followed by your students in their university studies. Such a strategy was used by Andrew Rossiter (7) who chose

(7) Andrew Rossiter (1980): "Ecology, the Environment and the ESP Class" in *English Language Teaching Journal* Vol. XXXIV/4. July 1980.

Ecology and the Environment. He claims it was authentic practice and it had a very positive effect on motivation.

And motivation is my fifth point.

We are all aware of this problem which in its cruellest manifestation takes the form of student absenteeism. Many aspects here which I haven't time to consider. I will touch upon one only, viz. whether the severe subject-specific content of the courses we offer is perhaps a major cause of low notivation. Are we not in danger of manipulating our students like sausages in our ESP-machine? In British universities it was found that overseas students needed social English as well as ESP; hence the book "Communicate" by Morrow and Johnson (8) at Reading University, which was an attempt to satisfy this need. I know the Italian context is not the same (EFL, not ESL), but we can learn from this development.

One thing is surely agreed: any learning requires the personal commitment of the learner who as an individual will attempt to cope with the course presented to him in a personal way. If our ESP courses are too impersonal and too narrowly subject-oriented, we are in danger of "losing" him. So Leonardi's advocacy (p. 102 of the Cagliari report) which I mentioned in my introduction may in reality be a false economy.

Finally, a word about ourselves, the quality of the teacher. How competent are we? Is there a need for teacher-training courses for LSP teachers? If so, who should run them and what format should they take?

As. Morrow said in his talk yesterday, we are weak on *method*. To give a glaring example: the English Studies Series (9) has some excellent texts but on the whole terribly poor exercises. How many teachers plough through such inappropriate language work with their unfortunate students?

Seeing so many Italian teachers of LSP were themselves conditioned by a literary-orientated university training, I suspect that there is a very real need for teacher-training. As to who should be the trainers,

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(8) Keith Johnson and Keith Morrow (1979): *Communicate* (Cambridge University Press)

(9) Ronald Mackin, editor (1971): *English Studies Series* (Oxford University Press).

there aren't any! It's a question of self-help, which is probably the most efficient anyway. Perhaps those present here could set up a working party to consider ways of providing teacher-training courses. Would you want to involve the new IRRSAE committees or other university faculties? I am sure the British Council could give a crontribution here, eg. by facilitating links with SELMOUS.
The spin-off, I would hope, would be, as far as our students are concerned, more value for money.

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